AN APPROACH TO ART

MARY MULLEN

AN APPROACH TO ART

BY

MARY MULLEN

WITH FIFTY REPRODUCTIONS

PUBLISHED BY

THE BARNES FOUNDATION

MERION, PA.

1923

THE BARNES FOUNDATION

MERION, PA.

Chartered, December 4, 1922.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS.

JOSEPH LAPSLEY WILSON .	Director of Arboretum
ALBERT C. BARNES . . .	President
LAURA L. BARNES . . .	Vice-President
N. E. MULLEN	Secretary and Treasurer
MARY MULLEN	Associate Director of Education

JOHN DEWEY	Director of Education
LAURENCE BUERMEYER . .	Associate Director of Education

L. V. GEIGER	Recording Secretary
PAUL GUILLAUME . . .	Foreign Secretary

JOHN W. PRINCE	Curator of Arboretum
THOMAS H. STEVENSON . .	Curator of Paintings

ROBERTS AND MONTGOMERY, Attorneys.

PREFACE

THE plan outlined herein is based upon the generally accepted beliefs that life is primarily and chiefly a matter of feeling and that art in any form is a fragment of life presented to us enriched in feelings by means of the creative spirit of the artist; that makes art and life synonymous.

A sense of beauty is so common in human beings that it could rank almost with the instincts in universality. Unfortunately, the practical demands of life too often suppress it, or it becomes so overlaid with traditional and irrational dogmas that it never attains to an adequate development. The ways and means of making the sense of beauty contribute to the happiness of daily life could obviously be best approached by a study of the factors to the situation: The attributes of human nature, the objective qualities of a work of art, and the aesthetic experience itself which results when man and art come in contact.

The intention of this book is to serve as a primer to people who have a sense of beauty sufficiently active to prompt them to wish to see in works of art and in life itself those aesthetic aspects which are too often overlooked. The plan as presented is based upon an experience of more than ten years' continuous practice as a part of a systematic educational plan which accepted the modern definition that education means movement, direction, growth, development. A large and varied collection of paintings and a circulating library of good literature gradually grew as the system developed. The only requirement for participation was an interest in the thing itself, for itself, and for as long a time as that interest sustained itself by its own power. That interest was the sense of beauty cultivated for the sake of the values it contributed to human happiness.

The plan as presented in this book can be only of the barest essentials which the experience proved are indispens-

able. It represents the ideas of many writers, artists, educators of widely-divergent viewpoints and only such of their ideas as fit into the solution of the specific problem. The general foundation of the plan is based upon the psychology evolved by William James, John Dewey, George Santayana and Bertrand Russell. But the structure owes its identity to individual contributions to psychology, aesthetics and education made by Havelock Ellis, Roger Fry, Bernard Hart, Laurence Buermeyer, Albert C. Barnes and others. Some of the best and most practical ideas originated with the students themselves as results of their own reactions to the environment. If the approach to the study of art as stated in this book proves serviceable to others it will be because experience has again proved to be the best teacher.

AN APPROACH TO ART

Art and Imitation

It is interesting to try to get a definition of the art of painting from people whom one meets in the every-day walks of life. Most of them think of painting as an imitation of natural objects, but when questioned further confess that they like many pictures that do not copy nature. Imitations are disappointing in all phases of life and the art-world is no exception; there must be a more valid reason why the pictorial arts give us so much pleasure. We know human nature well enough to be quite sure that painting could not have secured such a firm hold on men and held its place in their lives through many centuries, if it were merely a likeness of natural objects. An imitation is never satisfying; the feeling that it isn't true or real disturbs us, we desire things that we can depend upon. Dependability is one of the needs of human existence; in our world of constant change, we try by all means in our power to make some things permanent and stable so that we know just what to expect from them. For instance, we could not get a sense of satisfaction from an imitation diamond in a ring. We know that sooner or later it will lose its lustre and show itself for what it is; we have a feeling that it is not real. If we have a genuine stone we know that it will always retain its brilliance; we may have to polish it from time to time, but we know that we can depend upon it.

It is just the same in regard to art. If art is only an imitation of nature, then nature would be much more satisfying than art and art would not be worth all the bother that has been made about it. If art is nothing more than a likeness of a natural object, then the highest praise we could pay an artist would be to say that he is skillful in copying nature and we would then look upon his products as objects to excite our wonder because of their skillful workmanship. But we know that art in itself is very much worth while, that it gives us a great deal of pleasure, that it is wonderfully satisfying.

Instincts and Imagination

We all know that human beings have instincts; that is, when we become aware of certain objects or situations in the world, they arouse in us particular feelings which are termed emotions and, without stopping to think or reason about them, we act in a certain way. If we are walking along the street and see a run-away horse coming toward us, we at once have the feeling or emotion of fear and turn immediately and run in another direction to get out of its way; we do not stop and wonder why the horse ran away or why he happened to come in our direction; we simply start and run. Or, we might notice a crowd of people who seem very much interested in something going on in their midst. Immediately the emotion of wonder is aroused and our instinct of curiosity makes us try to find out what is causing the excitement, in spite of the fact that it probably does not concern us.

Animals as well as human beings have many different instincts, but man is superior to the animal in that after a thing has happened he can recall the whole incident; even when this recollection of past experience is simply to serve a present need, as when we try to recall a street and number a man has given us; but sometimes we recall the past because we enjoy repeating the experience, and such recall undertaken for its own sake is imagination, or the germ of imagination. In this way a person lives a dual life, one actual and the other imaginative. The great difference between these two lives is that in the actual existence, the instinctive reactions, such as the flight from danger, are of the utmost importance and we bend all our energies to accomplish what our instincts prompt us to do. But in the imaginative life we do not have to *act;* all we have to do is to use our imagination to recall what has happened, how we felt and what might have happened. In real life all our attention is centered on *action;* in the imaginative life, we are interested in what we see and feel and, since we do not have to act, we see a great deal more of what is going on within our line of vision and we have time to think about our feelings.

The fact that in real life all our attention is centered on action can be well-illustrated by the moving pictures. If we see Tom Mix on the screen and he gets into a fight, we are conscious of all the details of the scene. We notice what each

character is doing. Perhaps there will be people behind trees waiting for a chance to shoot him, perhaps in the distance we see a rescuing party coming along at full gallop; somebody else is trying to catch his horse; we take note of the landscape. But suppose we were watching a fight in actual life we would be most likely so concerned about possible damage to one of the participants that our attention would be concentrated upon summoning a policeman to stop the fight or even a physician to treat the injured. In the two cases our feelings would be entirely different. In the actual fight our emotions would be so strong that we would not think about them at all; we would be relatively unconscious of them. But in the moving pictures, while we do experience the emotions that the actors on the screen are depicting, they are very much weaker than our emotions in actual life and we can think about them and examine them. If we see a train wreck in the movies, we may feel a certain amount of pity for the victims but since we know that it is only a moving picture, that nobody is hurt and that it is not necessary for us to *act* in order to relieve suffering, our sense of pity is not nearly so strong as if we had seen an actual train wreck; we are not living our actual life in the movies, we are living our imaginative life. We use our imagination in order to understand why the different characters act as they do; we try to imagine their feelings by thinking of how we would feel and what we would do in their place and if they do not act as we think they should, then we try to interpret their behavior in some other way.

Different Kinds of Imagination

All human beings live this secondary imaginative life to some extent; but not all flight of fancy, not all non-practical contemplation, constitutes the imaginative life that gives birth to art. Idle day-dreaming, "building castles in Spain," is imagination and if given free play, interferes with the everyday duties of life; we cannot depend on people who lose sight of the workaday world. If this imaginative life is carried to the extreme, we term the people insane. In asylums there are many patients who are living the life of the imagination entirely. One man will tell us that he is a king and all the people about him are his subjects, in spite of the fact that he works just like the other inmates; and nothing we can say or do will convince him that he is not a king.

The actual and the imaginative lives must be combined if we are to remain normal, balanced people—either while we are at work, or play. For instance: Suppose an emergency arises where one of the large tanks in a factory has to be emptied more quickly than usual. The manager has to make rapid plans as to just what she will do, how many girls she will need, at which machines she will place each girl, how she will place her stock, etc. In order to make these plans, she uses imagination and experience—her imagination, guided by her past experience, forms a picture in her mind as to how she will accomplish this work. If her plans work out just as she hoped they would, the accomplished result has in it an aesthetic element.

In making plans for our leisure so that it will be more satisfactory and sensible, the imagination, influenced by the intelligence, prompts us, for example, to read worth-while books instead of trashy ones; to look at good pictures and try to find out something about them; to go to the theatre when the play is diverting and intelligent and not merely to kill time.

The artist has one great advantage in his work over the ordinary person: he is free to express himself in any way he wishes; his work is not bound by moral obligations, he does not have to work according to a rule; he does not have to try to please anybody; he is absolutely free to express himself. But there is after all one condition that he must fulfill if his art is to be appreciated by others; he must compose it in a form that can be understood by the observer: otherwise the latter will be baffled and it will mean nothing to him.

Only when the object about which the imagination plays has in itself a special interest for the observer and gives him a pleasurable emotion, can it be the basis upon which the imagination builds up a work of art. But the artist does not lose all contact with the actual world; in his conception of the form which he wishes his work of art to assume, there will be practical questions involved, even though it is not necessary to act at that very moment. If the artist wishes to paint a landscape and with the help of his imagination plans the form in his mind, he does not lose sight of the fact that he will have to place the objects in the landscape in certain relation to each other. Practical things may not be in the foreground of his consciousness, but it is a habit of human beings to think of objects in terms of their uses

even when there is no necessity to use them. This practical habit explains the difficulty most people have when they endeavor to contemplate an object for the enjoyment of its beauty alone; as for instance if our attention is called to the lovely lines of a chair, to its color, its design, we observe it so that we may enjoy its beauty; but we do not forget that the chair is to sit in.

A sharp distinction must be made between the imagination that results in creation and the imagination that is idle day-dreaming. We have emphasized the fact that in real life *action* is paramount; but in saying that in the imaginative life there is no necessity for action, we do not mean that the creative imaginative life is absolutely passive and all we have to do is to let our fancies float aimlessly about; that is day-dreaming and leads to no real enjoyment; it is mere effortless contemplation, a sham and a counterfeit. The creative imagination is alert and active, it is in constant contact with the practical world, but its aim is to discover new aspects of life and to embody those discoveries in fit and meaningful expressions. It is this creative imagination that makes our actual life so much fuller and richer and deeper; it is from this source that all our ideals, all our hopes and longings spring.

The Creative Impulse

When a painter sees something in nature that strikes him as beautiful, it stimulates his imagination and feelings and thus is born the creative impulse which prompts him to express what he feels. He tries to put on canvas his ideas of the object and the feelings which he experienced. This is not just as easy as it sounds. The artist's hand is not guided by some divine power, and many people who are really artists in their appreciation of beauty, cannot adequately express themselves. An artist works over a canvas a long time before he is satisfied that it reveals just what he feels and many a man with the spirit of the artist is not recognized as such because he lacks the ability to put down his aesthetic vision and feelings. A person with a highly developed sense of beauty, but unable to express himself by means of paint and canvas, will experience feelings as deep and satisfying as those of an artist when an object stimulates him to expression. An example of this is when a connoisseur acquires paintings and sculpture which he

knows are expressions of the artists' true feelings communicated to him, and places those objects where every time he sees them he experiences those emotions. He arranges the pictures and sculpture of the different artists in such a way that each individual work contributes its share to the making of a perfect whole. The result is a wonderful creation, comparable in its unity and loveliness with the separate paintings; in that case the collector is the artist. Art, in addition to being an expression of the imaginative life, may serve to arouse the imaginative life to action, and great results may follow that stimulation. Even scientific facts, which we usually think of as belonging to our actual existence, were first discovered by means of the imagination. This is especially true of the embodiments of scientific discoveries, the aëroplane for instance. Men saw birds flying easily, swiftly and gracefully and they soon began to wonder why men could not fly. They used their imaginations, in conjunction with actual facts, to work out schemes that would prove practical; after many failures and new trials, the aëroplane became a reality.

Habit Adapted to Art

We know that works of art interest us and stimulate our imagination, but do we know just why? Nearly everybody is more or less sensitive to the different elements in a picture, the combination of which elements go to the making of a work of art. Very often when a painting pleases us we can account for the pleasurable emotion, but sometimes we do not know why we like it and we are only conscious of the fact that we do like it. If we are not particularly interested, we are satisfied to say that we like a picture or do not like it and then dismiss the subject. But if we are sensitive and it stimulates our interest, we want to know why we like some paintings and do not like others. Often we find that upon close acquaintance the very pictures which at first did not appeal to us contain certain elements that we admire greatly and by studying them intelligently and using our imagination we grow to appreciate their fine qualities so much that we are scarcely conscious of the elements that disturbed us at first. In that way is developed the habit of looking at a picture for what is in it.

Beauty and Value Defined

Before we go directly to works of art to determine just what their emotional values are, it will be well for us to define some of the terms that are constantly used in relation to art, but generally with loose, indefinite meaning.

"Beauty" and "value" are two such terms. We say beauty is a value, but what do we mean by the expression? The most satisfactory way of defining such terms is to find out how they came to exist, where we find them and of what they consist in relation to experience; in other words, to what do they correspond in our lives?

In every-day life, when an object has a value for us, we mean that it satisfies some need of our nature, that it makes life more worth while; in short, it is a satisfaction of an instinct. All our emotions are either directly or indirectly the result of instincts. Instincts exist and we accept them—we do not have to explain them; neither do we have to account for the sense of satisfaction we experience when our instincts are allowed free play; that also we accept. And it is just this sense of satisfaction, this feeling that an object exactly serves its purpose, that gives it a value for us; it need not be a useful purpose, it may only give us a pleasurable emotion, but so long as it does what we think it should do, that is, has a meaning for us, it has a value.

Art and life are inseparably woven together and their values are rooted in the same soil, the instincts. But one quality that distinguishes art values is that we try to express those values or emotions in an object; that is we objectify them. We embody our feelings in pictures if we are painters, in music if we are musicians; we make the expression permanent so that we have it not only for today and tomorrow but for future years. In actual life when we experience an emotion our impulse is to *act;* as when our self-esteem is hurt we have the impulse to fight. The difference is that in art the instincts endeavor to create something in the world; in real life they react upon and modify in some way the situation that aroused them.

Instincts as noted above simply exist and are, by their very nature, not to be reasoned about in justification of their existence; we know that they are implanted in every human being and that they must have an outlet, that they cannot be suppressed. If they are denied natural expression they

will find some other means of freeing themselves and whether their expression is good or evil depends upon the channels into which they flow. Frequently the various instincts, instead of working together, conflict with one another, as for instance, if we want to learn stenography, perhaps our ability to learn it is not nearly so great as another person's and very soon the feeling that we are not as capable as some one else asserts itself and says we cannot do it. Then unless we make up our minds that we can and will do it, our feeling of inferiority wins the day and we do not do it. The positive self-feeling, or the feeling that we should have the ability to do it has been suppressed, and because of this suppression we become dissatisfied and resentful, and unless we can turn to some other work where the self-esteem is free to express itself we shall never get over that feeling of resentment and it will have a bad effect on our lives. All the troubles in the world, big and little, can be traced to conflicting instincts, and the failure of one of them to secure adequate satisfaction.

If we admit that instincts are not based on reason, then their emotional manifestation and, in turn, the free expression of that emotion are also non-rational, then art itself is non-rational and we recognize its freedom as one of the values of art. When we say that art is free, that it is not hampered by moral or useful values, we do not mean that those values are never expressed in art; they very often are and add much to our pleasure, but they are not essential art values.

Very often when we look at a work of art we try to make fidelity to nature a standard by which we judge of its value, and condemn it if it does not look like a natural object. But for an object to be beautiful, to have aesthetic value, it does not have to be true to nature. A portrait by Modigliani has enough resemblance to his model to enable us to understand it, but he does not copy nature. In art, fidelity to literal appearance is not one of its prime necessities; it may or may not follow nature—that makes no difference; if the work of art means something to us, gives us a sense of satisfaction, it fulfills its mission. Literal copies of nature may in themselves arouse pleasure but they are not art, their expression lacks the free, personal feeling of the artist himself.

Neither do we make moral judgments a criterion of a work of art, since art must be free to follow its bent. Morality constantly has in mind the evil that is present or that may

appear in the future; and its aim is to avoid evil. If morality is made a value of art then the spontaneity and freedom of art are lost.

"Rationality, if used as a conscious guide, also impedes art in that the response is not immediate. We experience a great sense of satisfaction in objects that are primarily rational, but they may lack the freedom and spontaneity that characterize great art. Rationality in art is a by-product."

Art values, then, have the qualities of non-rationality, immediacy and permanency and, since beauty is an art value, it must necessarily share these same qualities of non-rationality, immediacy and permanency. Beauty and value mean the same thing to us; an object is beautiful if it has values that satisfy our instinctive longings, both by the way it is presented and the feelings it arouses, and since art must be objectified and made permanent in one form or another a work of art is beautiful insofar as it gathers together its different qualities in such a manner that each of them does its utmost toward making the finished object satisfying.

Form Defined

At this point it will be convenient to define accurately the term "form" as used in relation to art. "Form" is the *unification* of many details toward the development of the central idea so that the art object most fittingly represents what the artist wishes to express. The details of a work of art constitute the matter; "form" is achieved when those details are unified. Many people use "form" when they mean shape; others use "form" in the sense of solidity and extension in three dimensions; that is, when a picture is so composed that the objects look as though they are actually solid, when depth is as apparent as length and breadth, when the depicted object gives us the feeling that it could be picked up and handled just like a natural object, and when the spaces not only define objects but give us the feeling of actual intervals or extensions, such as we experience in life.

If the term "form" in the pictorial arts is restricted to solidity and extension in three dimensions, then much of the art of the past as well as the present must be regarded as inferior. Because Chinese pictures are essentially flat, do they arouse no aesthetic emotion? Shall Pascin's pictures be condemned because his figures do not have the feeling of solidity?

"Form" cannot be confined to any thing so limited; we have "forms" in infinite variety; in fact, as we have seen, *form is the principle that unifies*. If one picture pleases us more than another it may be only a question of personal preference and not a question as to whether or not the picture has "form." If we are specially interested in drawing, then a Degas will be eminently satisfying; and nobody will deny that Degas' drawings have form; that is, that his drawings unify, even though his figures do not have solidity. Modigliani's "forms" are flat and entirely different from Kisling's "forms" which seem solid. There is one general rule, however, governing "form" in art, whether it be pictures, sculpture, music, drama, or any of its other branches, and that is that the "form" must be suitable to the material (matter), just as the material must be selected with reference to the "form;" each depends upon the other and no art is possible without their combination; matter without form has no meaning for us, and form without matter is too abstract to interest us; in their combination, matter supplies the variety and form the unity, which is necessary in all works of art. An example in real life: We select materials for a dress suitable for the style (pattern) we have in mind and the combination of the materials and pattern creates a satisfactory gown. If we have all the materials but do not use them, they lose interest because they do not mean anything to us as a dress—they are just separate articles and lack unity. On the other hand, if we have a style in our mind and no material with which to make the dress, it is a mere flight of fancy as far as that particular dress is concerned.

Experience Defined

In actual life "form" is "the characteristic impression left in the mind by experience" and such "forms" are possessed by every human being. They are the ideas we store in our minds of objects or situations after they have become meaningful for us as a result of our experience, our direct contact with them. Experience, in the true sense of the word, is not a one-sided activity; it is not only what we do to the situation but also what the situation does to us; circumstances change us as often as we change circumstances and unless we see the relationship and profit by the results, events have no meaning for us. A child trips on a rug and tumbles down the stairs. If he realizes that it was the rug that caused the trouble,

he will avoid that rug in the future; but if he does not connect the rug with his tumble, the next time he comes down the stairs he is likely to fall again and will probably repeat the performance until he realizes that the rug has something to do with it; then he either removes the rug or uses more care in stepping on it.

Our forms in every-day life may become mere memories but no matter how faint those memories are, we never lose the emotional feeling with which the experience itself was surrounded; life is so much a matter of feeling that there is an emotional color to all experience, that is to all our forms.

The Creative Artist

An artist is a person who can express his experience (forms) in a suitable material so that they will arouse similar feelings in the observer. The expression, however, is not an exact copy of the object that aroused the artist's emotion; in fact what makes the artist a creator is his ability to rearrange his experiences into new and more meaningful forms—that is, he puts on canvas certain aspects of nature, as he conceives them by the use of his imagination. The artist's clearer and larger vision is of utmost importance to most of us since, by the objectification of what he feels, he makes it possible for us to see beauties that were previously hidden from us. In the case of a landscape, not only do we enjoy the picture with its wonderful revelations and the artist's own interpretation, but the next time we see a natural landscape we view it with more feeling than we did before, because the artist has pointed the way, has given us a clew.

Communication to Others

We have seen that a work of art is the result of some situation in life that stimulated the artist's feelings sufficiently for his imagination to recast that experience into a new and more meaningful form. If his creation reveals to us the broader vision, the deeper insight, the more intense feelings which the experience meant to him, that is explicitly a communication of similar feelings to us. That communication is the function of a work of art if it is of any social value. But if the form of his expression arouses no emotional response in us—that is, it has no meaning for us—it is because we have never had a similar experience or cannot by our own powers imagine the

artist's experience. In looking at a picture it must be a real experience for us, if it is to be worth while. The picture itself stimulates our senses, but it can do no more than that unless we see a meaning in the "form" which the artist portrays, unless we project into that "form" our own personal feelings. To intelligently approach such work requires on our part a mind not closed to new forms which do not correspond to what we have previously decided are standards in art.

The Greatest Obstacle to Appreciation

The trouble with a great many of us is that when we once get a form fixed in our minds, we never want to change it. This inertia is a characteristic of human nature. Then when a new form is presented by an artist, it does not correspond to the "form" we already have, and instead of trying to comprehend the new form by using our imagination, we reject it and say that it is not art. This happens constantly when the works of modern artists, music as well as paintings, are presented to the public for the first time. If instead of rejecting the new form, we examine it more closely to find what the artist means; if instead of turning away in disdain we use our imagination and try to get the artist's viewpoint, we may be rewarded by a keener and deeper insight into the joy of life. These fixed forms, which refuse to expand, are accountable for most of the adverse criticism we read in the newspapers and magazines whenever new forms of art appear. Criticism written by persons who should be sensitive to and interested in all phases of the art about which they write, but who have only a very limited knowledge and experience, is sent broadcast and serves to prejudice many readers. The articles are not in any sense criticism of art but a statement of what their authors in their ignorance, see and feel. If instead of expressing their personal opinion in reference to objects about which they have no knowledge, they would make the announcement that new forms of art have appeared, and then allow the public to get its own reactions uninfluenced by adverse comments, it would be at least a step in the right direction.

Artists paint, or write, or compose music because their feelings must have an outlet and will not be denied. For the same reasons, we are drawn to art; it is an innate desire to live vicariously the ideal life; to remould the world in

conformity with the heart's desire. Adverse criticism is powerless to stifle this creative instinct; it acts merely to delay recognition to the creators of new artistic forms and to rob us of joys which if it were not for our natural inertia, we could appreciate by our own efforts.

Characteristics of Aesthetic Feeling

In actual life we do not pay much attention to our incidental feelings or emotions, because we are too anxious to accomplish what we have set out to do. When trying to cross a street where there is traffic congestion all we think about is getting across. Normally we do not stop to consider whether we are afraid or not. In the imaginative life, where we are not concerned with action and where the emotion is not so keen, we have time to think about our feelings; that is we are conscious of our emotion and we can examine it; find out why we feel as we do. When we are looking at a picture all we have to do is to look at it, take it in and enjoy it, we do not have to *act*. In this enjoyment the relative deficiency in the intensity of the feelings, as compared with practical life, is made up for by its increased richness and stability.

The emotions we feel in actual life almost always have some useful value. If we experience fear, we turn and run; if our curiosity is stimulated, we investigate the cause. But the emotions we experience in the imaginative life do not serve any practical purpose; we simply enjoy them and they are all the more enjoyable because they are so free from any restrictions or consequences. In art, then, we appreciate the emotion just for the sake of the emotion itself and this constitutes the difference between the aesthetic feeling and the emotions that we meet in the affairs of every-day life.

What to Look for in a Work of Art

To learn what qualities a work of art must possess in order to arouse the aesthetic feeling, we will turn to art itself and examine it; and to simplify matters, we shall confine ourselves to *pictorial* art.

When we look at a picture, if each element seems to combine with the others to form a harmonious whole, then the picture has unity; and unity is the first quality that a picture must possess. In that case the painting satisfies our sense of beauty. If the picture lacks unity, if there are some unrelated details,

we have a feeling that something ought to be done to it to make it more satisfying. Unity may be illustrated in every-day life by a person who is appropriately dressed. Suppose a girl is going for a walk, if she wears a short walking skirt, a sweater, low-heeled shoes and a sports hat, we feel that she is dressed just right for the occasion. But suppose she wears a fancy, elaborate hat instead of a simple sports hat, at once we have a feeling of dissatisfaction; she spoils the unity of the whole by just one detail that clashes with the general effect.

In the same way a picture does not satisfy us if the drawing is not expressive, or the color is not appropriate to the subject, or the figures are scattered over the canvas; it does not hang together; it lacks the quality of harmony. For a picture to possess unity all the different elements must be so composed, that is, related to each other, that they serve the central idea and form a design which is satisfying.

The next quality which we demand in painting is variety and we must have variety in order to arouse and hold our interest. A painting must have enough different elements in it to keep our attention; we like the color, the graceful lines, the arrangement of the different objects, etc.

Design in a picture consists of the harmonious combination of many different elements whose relation to each other impresses the observer with a sense of fitness; the picture is then said to have "plastic unity." These elements are—

1. MASS—that quality in the object portrayed which seems to give it weight or enable it to resist pressure.

2. Graceful, flowing lines and the arrangement of the lines and masses in such order and sequence that they give a sense of RHYTHM.

3. SPACE—that element in a picture which makes us feel that it is not just a plain surface, but that there are intervals between the different objects, that they are not just placed one on top of the other. Space in a picture is nothing in itself; that is, it is not like an object that can be actually depicted, but the illusion of space can be so contrived that it orders the objects in relation to one another.

4. LIGHT and SHADE—the effect obtained by the contrast of light against dark.

5. COLOR—which functions in itself and in relation to light and shade.

Why These Attributes Move Us

All of these attributes which stir us in art are connected with the necessary conditions of our actual life. Mass is a physical necessity of the real world; we have a feeling of being able to resist pressure if we get in a crowd; a house stands firmly on its foundations and resists rain and wind and will not fall down. Rhythmical movements are a part of all physical activities: It gives us a thrill to see eight men in a boat all pulling together in perfect time; we admire a person who walks gracefully; we like the graceful, rhythmical movements of dancing. Space is something we make use of almost every minute of our lives: Every time we take a step we unconsciously judge the distance for each step; if the girls in a factory are using a corking machine they know just how far they have to move the bottles in order to get them in the right position; if we are on a high elevation we judge of the distance between us and all of the objects within our line of vision. Light and shade and also colors are so much a part of our physical life that we can hardly imagine what life would be without them; they define objects for us, they make the different objects stand out and help us to get a much more definite image of them; they bring out contrasts between different objects and in different parts of the same object.

Color

Color, apart from its quality of defining objects for us, has a decided emotional value in the pictorial arts. Color, in itself, is a purely sensuous element, but it readily becomes an element of beauty because it is so much a part of the objects which we look upon as independent of ourselves and our *visual* conception of those objects is so spontaneous and easy. We never get the clear, definite, easy image of an external object through the other senses (taste, touch, smell, hearing) as we do through sight, and just because our visual conceptions are so easy, and because it is from our conception of external objects that we obtain our aesthetic emotions, it is evident that most of the beauty we perceive comes through sight. That color is deeply involved here is clearly obvious.

We have individual color stimulations just as we have other individual sense stimulations. Just as high and low sounds have their different feeling-tones and sweet or spicy smells have their different feeling-tones, so too do the different colors have their individual feeling-tones; some colors please, others

repel. Perhaps in the near future color sensation will be developed in ordinary people just as sound has been developed into music; the color organ is a step in that direction. So far that development has not had much meaning for us; but as soon as we learn to discriminate between the feeling-tones of different color sensations and ally those sensations with similar sensations we experience in other fields, then colors by their combination acquire form and meaning. In looking at paintings by Giorgione, Rubens, and Renoir a connoisseur can experience forms by his sensitivity to color and his power to abstract it from all other elements of the painting.

That colors do have a meaning for some people may be illustrated by the case of a person who is in constant contact with modern colorful pictures. The brilliant colors become so much a part of the pictures themselves, they express so much of joy and delight, they intensify the emotion so much, that he will look for and expect color in all works of art. He will enjoy that distinctive quality, closely akin to color, which enters into certain forms of music, literature and drama. That color meant more to Renoir than a mere appeal to the senses, is shown by his use of it as a unifying and structural element in realizing a great variety of harmonious, plastic forms.

Emotional and Sensuous Elements Inseparably Interwoven

It appears then that the emotional elements of art are so closely interwoven with the elements of our physical existence, that we cannot point to one element and say this is sensuous, and to another and say this is emotional; each element is both emotional and sensuous, and it cannot be otherwise because we must have the sensuous elements in order to express what moves us emotionally, that is aesthetically. It must be embodied in what we perceive, that is, in the sensuous elements. An aesthetic emotion divorced from its object is a contradiction in terms.

In art the emotion is different from the pleasure of the senses alone, in that it is free, not restrained by the necessity for action; it is ideal, not hampered by material things; it is eminently satisfying. And we often feel that this imaginative life is after all our real life and that the physical life is something that we must tolerate in order to enjoy that of the imagination.

Personality the Essence of Art Expression

After going over all the different elements that unite to make a work of art, one might say that nature fulfills all these conditions. That is true. The appreciation of nature, however, lacks an element which seems essential to the aesthetic experience which art gives us. In a work of art an object is recreated in a new medium. This recreation proclaims the triumph of our human consciousness in bending to its purposes an alien and not wholly tractable stuff or matter. Our enjoyment of a work of art is in part, at least, a delight in this conquest. The beauty of nature involves no such conquest and our appreciation of it is therefore necessarily lacking in an essential element of art experience.

The human artist uses all his capacity to express what he feels; he has a purpose in his work insofar as he tries to put on canvas the feelings which certain objects or situations stimulate. Nature is limited; she has neither the power nor the human capacity to make a landscape different from what it happens to be. A painter can often improve on the parts of nature which are not beautiful. A natural landscape may lack satisfying design and the artist when he paints can correct that fault. The result may not look like a natural landscape when he has finished, but it will probably be more beautiful. Whether the artist copies nature or not is not significant; if he can follow nature and still put into his picture his own feelings, his own personality, it is a great picture; but if in order to express his feelings it is necessary for him to distort natural objects, his creation is nevertheless a work of art and he is justified in what he does.

All people have the possibilities of becoming artists who can take any material whatsoever and by bending it to their will evolve an object that will stimulate pleasurable emotions. If a man can take the every-day things of life and change them in such a way that they give an added pleasure, make life more livable, he is in some degree an artist. It is the development of sensitivity to this recasting that is the approach to art.

Conclusions

Art and life are one and the same thing, they cannot be separated. Art is not a phase of life that transcends life itself, a thing to be approached only on sacred occasions; art is as much a part of reality

as the imagination is a part of actual existence. Each depends upon the other.

Art interests us because its subject matter is life and the artist has made it more interesting than reality because he takes the world we live in and shows us certain aspects of it that we would not ourselves perceive. He takes the raw material, the phases of life which are visible to everybody and remoulds them into "forms" which are new and more full of meaning to us. Works of art satisfy us because the *values*, that is, the qualities of objects or events which appeal to us, are revealed more clearly by the artist; they are intensified because the artist sees more deeply into their meaning and presents them to us as he sees and feels them.

Reality is something that touches our personal interest—politics are not real to us unless we know something about them; war is not real to us until we come in contact with it. Reality is a quality that every work of art must possess—an object that has no relation to human experience is not art. Art must present to the observer an aspect of life that the artist himself has experienced and it must be presented in such a form that it communicates the feelings of that experience to the observer.

A sense of beauty is so common to human beings that we accept its universality just as we do that of love or hate or fear. Unfortunately, this sense of beauty is not taken seriously in the hustle and bustle of every-day life; it is not given the attention and the guidance that it needs and deserves, but is left to get along the best way it can. If it is not ignored it is set aside as something apart from life; something strange, something we come in contact with only occasionally. The practical demands of life are so urgent that they often suppress this hunger for beauty; or traditional and irrational theories so smother it that it looses the freedom which is so necessary for its growth. If we could only realize that life is fundamentally a matter of feeling, that we look upon feeling as more important than the *events* of life and that the human desire to share those feelings is a normal trait of positive social value, our actual world would more nearly approximate the ideal. All human activities, when not merely means to an end, constitute the essential material of art. It is the many diverse manifestations of those activities that give the charm and spirituality to life. Art is simply the revelation

of those activities embodied in perceptible forms capable of communicating the emotional content of the experience to us.

[In the foregoing discussion the word "emotional" has been used as descriptive of aesthetic feeling, principally to conform to popular terminology. That use of the word is justified to a certain extent, by reason of the probably common origin of both art and pure emotion in the instincts; besides, a certain quality of feeling-tone seems to be inherent in both pure emotion and the aesthetic experience.

It must be remembered, however, that traditional psychology has confined the meaning of the word "emotion" to the distinctive feelings which accompany the primary instincts, like fear, love, wonder, anger, disgust and similar elementary states. Hence, while we cannot speak of the "aesthetic emotion" in the same sense as we correctly say the "emotion of fear," there seems to be sufficient justification to employ the word "emotional" as indicative of a certain quality which makes aesthetic feeling something distinctive in itself, and yet distinct from pure emotion. It is in that relation only that art may be termed an "expression of emotion," or aesthetic experience spoken of as "emotional feeling."]

REPRODUCTIONS

The accompanying reproductions illustrate plastic form in a few of its many diverse manifestations. In each work represented the artist has rearranged, into new and emotionally-moving forms, an experience which he himself has had in life. In looking at these particular works of art, a trained observer will participate in the feelings which the artist experienced; and he will recognize in the work the artist's knowledge of the great traditions of his calling and a high degree of technical skill. To appraise works of art according to any standards short of a wide and genuine experience of life and a knowledge of the principles of human nature which form the basis of art, is not an art judgment, but an expression of prejudice. And art, like life, is too complex to be measured by the measuring-stick of our prejudices.

It is because the people of any age naturally prefer those art forms to which they have grown accustomed, that an artist of genius who recreates his experience into new forms, invariably suffers contumely, derision and neglect, at first. In the latter part of the last century Renoir, Cezanne, Sisley and Monet were denounced by critics and the public as charlatans and adventurers; today each of those artists is represented by numerous examples in the Louvre. The present-day painters who imitate those formerly-derided masters receive the prizes at exhibitions and are acclaimed as great by the public; in other words, the art creations of a generation ago have become the accepted standards of our art judgments of today. But those contemporary artists whose work we do not understand because they express their experience in new forms are denounced quite as vehemently as were Renoir and Cezanne, less than forty years ago. That injustice serves chiefly to rob ourselves of the pleasures that would come could we but grasp the meaning of the artists' revelations. Upon this point let us read what was written by a man whom a great American writer has designated as "undoubtedly the most civilized Englishman living today:"

"How slowly and painfully the function of aesthetics works every one must know by observing the aesthetic judg-

ments of other people, if not by recalling his own experiences. I know in my own experience how hardly and subconsciously this process works. In the matter of pictures, for instance, I have found throughout life, from Rubens in adolescence to Cezanne in recent years, that a revelation of the beauty of a painter's work which, on the surface, is alien or repulsive to one's sensibility, came only after years of contemplation, and then most often by a sudden revelation, in a flash, by a direct intuition of the beauty of some particular picture which henceforth became the clue to all the painter's work.

"Schopenhauer long ago pointed out that a picture should be looked at as a royal personage is approached, in silence, until the moment it pleases to speak to you, for, if you speak first (and how many critics one knows who 'speak first!'), you expose yourself to hear nothing but the sound of your own voice. In other words, it is a spontaneous and 'mystical' experience." (Havelock Ellis, *The Dance of Life.*)



CEZANNE
Portrait of Mme. Cezanne



RENOIR
Bathers



CEZANNE
Landscape



RENOIR
Embroiderers



CEZANNE
Flowers



RENOIR
Marchand des Pommes



CEZANNE
Still Life



RENOIR
Landscape



CEZANNE
Portrait



RENOIR
Mother and Child



DEGAS
Ballet Dancers



MANET

Tarring Boat



SISLEY
Landscape



VAN GOGH
Smoker



VAN GOGH
Landscape



DAUMIER
The Water-Carrier



MONET
Woman Embroidering



DAUMIER
The Water-Carrier



MONET
Woman Embroidering



MATISSE
Joy of Life



PICASSO
Composition



MATISSE
Nude



PICASSO
Baby



MATISSE
Still Life



PICASSO
Still Life



ROUSSEAU (Le Douanier)
Figure in Landscape



UNKNOWN—FRENCH
Date about 1840



UTRILLO
Landscape



GLACKENS
Pony Ballet



GLACKENS
Race Track



ROUAULT
Bust



LIPCHITZ
Figure



LIPCHITZ
Figure



MAURICE PRENDERGAST
Landscape



AFRICAN SCULPTURE
Before 10th Century



AFRICAN SCULPTURE
About 7th Century



SOUTINE
Figure



SOUTINE
Landscape



PASCIN
Figure



PASCIN
Landscape



DEMUTH
Factory Tops



CHARLES PRENDERGAST
Carved Panel



KISLING
Nude



KISLING
Landscape



MODIGLIANI
La Jolie Menagére



MODIGLIANI
Figure



LOTIRON
Harvesters



LAWSON
Landscape



DE CHIRICO
Fantasy



MARCOUSSIS
Still Life



HALICHA
Still Life



SEGONZAC
Landscape

90-B75748

GETTY CENTER LIBRARY
3 3125 00008 0727

